



"I will pour out my Spirit upon all...

and your young shall see visions

and your old shall dream dreams."

--Acts 2:17

Voices & Visions

A publication of the Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ

Volume I, Number 5

November/December 1999

Letter to the Governor of South Carolina

The NAACP, the Urban League, and other civil rights organizations have called for a boycott of South Carolina because the state continues to fly the Confederate battle flag over the State House in Columbia. Leaders of our two congregations in Charleston have requested that the Southeast Conference honor the boycott, and not hold our Annual Meeting in 2000 in Charleston as planned. We are looking for an alternate site. Below is Conference Minister Timothy Downs' letter to the Governor of South Carolina explaining our decision. Copies of the letters from the Governor and others who responded to Dr. Downs' letter are available from the Conference Office.

September 13, 1999

The Honorable James Hodges
Columbia, South Carolina 29211

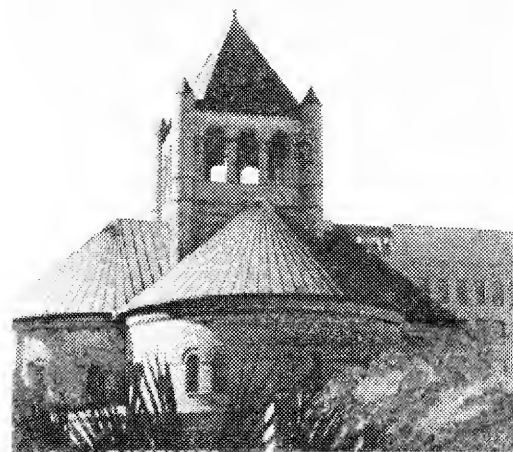
Dear Governor Hodges:

The Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ, which encompasses a five-state area including South Carolina, has been planning for two years to hold its Annual Meeting in June 2000 in Charleston. In August, I came to Charleston to meet with the pastors and other leaders of our two congregations in that city: Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ and Circular Congregational Church. We discussed at some length the boycott of South Carolina by conventions and tourists proposed by the NAACP and other civil rights organizations. These leaders unanimously urged the Southeast Conference to respect the proposed boycott. They asked us to take this stance on the basis of our Christian faith and our long tradition of witnessing to that faith through acts of justice and righteousness.

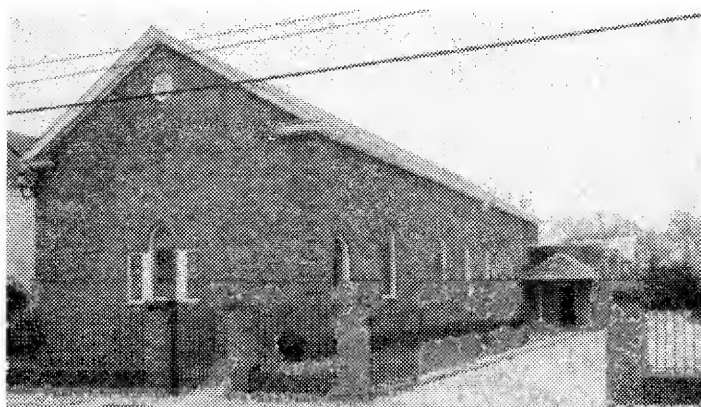
An African-American member of one of our congregations said recently,

"The sight

of the Confederate battle flag is like a stake through my heart, reminding me of the depth of the suffering of my parents and grandparents in a segregated South." You know better than I that the unfurling of the Confederate battle flag over the State House in Columbia is not simply a display honoring Southern courage and culture. It was first raised above the State House dome in February 1962, six weeks after Harvey Gantt, an African-American citizen of the state of South Carolina, applied for admission to Clemson College, creating a firestorm of protest.



Circular Congregational Church



Plymouth Congregational U.C.C.

(continued on page 2)



"Grace to you, and peace ..."

A Letter from the Conference Minister

Dear Friends:

In June, at the Annual Meeting of the Southeast Conference in Huntsville, Alabama, one of our pastors overheard a lay person say, "It used to feel as if not enough was happening in the Southeast Conference, now it feels like too much is happening." It is true that this is the time when the real work begins.

For the three years leading up to our Annual Meeting, we have planned and prayed, studied and thought. The unclear outlines of what it is that God is calling us to be are becoming more distinct. We have new faces on the Conference staff; we have new church starts that are beginning to take root. Some shake their heads and say, "I don't recognize this," and others nod their heads and say, "This feels good."

The author of the book of Ecclesiastes writes, "For every thing there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven. A time to be born, and a time to die. A time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted" (Eccl. 3:1-2). Change involves birth and death, planting and plucking up. It involves joy and pain, embracing the new and letting go of the old. I believe that the face of our Southeast Conference is beginning to change in many ways.

The United Church of Christ in the South has been through challenging and exciting times since the establishment of the Southeast Conference more than 30 years ago. As we go forward, we will be led by a gifted and visionary staff, as you can see in articles throughout this newsletter.

Some of you may recall the words of a hymn. "Spirit, spirit of restlessness, stir me from placidness; wind, wind on the sea." This is a time for Southeast Conference when the Spirit is stirring up restlessness out of our placidness. I invite you to be a part of this stirring with us.

In Christ,
Timothy C. Downs

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(continued from page 1)

The United Church of Christ in the South is the proud inheritor of the Congregational tradition. Before the War Between the States, the Congregational Church was a bedrock of the abolitionist movement. Following the war, it sent hundreds of missionaries into the South to establish more than 500 schools and 200 congregations to serve the recently freed African-American citizens of the Southern states. A number of those schools and congregations were established in South Carolina. We in the United Church of Christ have particular pride in the work of Avery Institute in Charleston, which for the better part of a century was not only an elementary and high school, but also a teacher training college. Avery Institute trained hundreds of leaders and professionals to serve the African-American community throughout the shadowed days of Jim Crow, touching countless lives, bringing education, hope, and opportunity.

As Christians, we recall the words of the Apostle Paul, "If one member [of the body of Christ] suffers, all suffer together with it. If one member is honored, all rejoice together with it" (I Corinthians 12:26). We believe that throughout his ministries, Jesus Christ came not to erect barriers between people, but to tear them down. The Apostle Paul affirms this when he writes, "There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28-29).

Given our long tradition of witnessing to issues of justice in the name of Jesus Christ; given the deep pain that the symbolism of the Confederate battle flag brings for many people of good will, because it was raised as a gesture of segregationist defiance in the heat of the Civil Rights Movement; given that we are committed to the honoring of all citizens, black and white as equal in the eyes of the law, and in the eyes of God; and finally, given that the leaders of two of our congregations, Plymouth Congregational Church and Circular Congregational Church, and their pastors, the Rev. James Fields and the Rev. Albert Keller, have urged us to respect this call to boycott, we will do so.

I can only urge you as the Governor of the state of South Carolina, and further urge the legislature of the state, to prayerfully and thoughtfully act to lower the battle flag of the Confederacy from its place on the State House dome. In so doing, you will join others of good will from across the United States who pray for a season of reconciliation and a time to put aside symbols which injure and divide.

Join the Challenge to Rid the World of Landmines!

Turn Fields of Fear into Fields of Hope



*Andrew Young and Joyce Myers-Brown
hold land mine replicas.*

About 250 people gathered at First Presbyterian Church in Atlanta on September 7 for a dinner, to raise money to clear a minefield in Mozambique and free a community from the horror of landmines. This effort is supported by the Southeast Conference. At our Annual Meeting in June, we passed a resolution calling on congregations and individuals to work to rid the world of the scourge of landmines, through advocacy for the Ban Treaty and through contributing funds toward mine clearance.

The United Nations Association, Atlanta Chapter, sponsored the dinner and has now raised approximately \$20,000 of the \$41,000 needed to clear the village of Aldeia 25 Junho in Gaza Province, Mozambique, through the Adopt-a-Minefield program. **Rev. Joyce Myers-Brown** chairs this program, and **Rev. Andrew Young** is Honorary Chair. Rev. Young addressed the gathering, as did **Ambassador Donald Steinberg**, the U.S. Special Representative for Global Humanitarian Demining. Both reminded the group of the tragedy of landmines: every 22 minutes someone, somewhere, often a child, steps on a landmine and is killed or maimed.

Thirty UCC members from four Atlanta-area congregations were present at the event and are following up with gifts and fund-raising activities. Central Congregational Church pledged \$400 from its Just Peace offering. One member of the church raised almost \$500 in a yard sale, and a couple is donating flower bulbs that sponsors can "buy" and plant at the church, symbolizing life in the face of the death represented by landmines.

All Southeast Conference friends and local churches are urged to consider an offering to this worthy cause. Please help "make one small corner of the world a safer place." Send contributions to: **UNA-USA, "Adopt-a-Minefield", P.O. Box 11662, Atlanta, GA 30355**. For more information, literature, videos, or a speaker, contact **Joyce Myers-Brown: 404-876-2421**.

Changes at the Office

New voice mail numbers have been added at the Conference Office: **Ginnie Ferrell, Director of the Resource Center, extension 204; Annette Nielsen, Moderator of the Georgia/South Carolina Association, 206**. Associate Conference Minister **Joyce Hollyday** is no longer receiving calls or mail at the Atlanta office. She can now be reached at P.O. Box 1627, Pisgah Forest, NC 28768; 800-442-1064. Please contact her there with your items for the newsletter.

Need to Make an Adjustment?

Are you getting too many copies of *Voices and Visions* for your congregation? Not enough? Are you lining the hamster cage with the extras, or having to photocopy all those great features to share with your friends? Please let Gerri Ryons-Hudson know at the Conference Office (800-807-1993) if you need to make an adjustment in your number of copies.

Voices & Visions

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Voices & Visions is the bimonthly newsletter of the Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ.

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New Church Start Strategy

After three years of preparation, fundraising, prayer, and planning, the Southeast Conference has renewed its new church start strategy, and has put into place two funded new church starts in the Atlanta area. We continue to provide training and resources to Community Congregational Church, UCC, in Montgomery, and we have a Search Committee for a new church pastor for Hillside Christian Church in LaGrange, Ga. **Community Congregational UCC, Montgomery.** This congregation has been meeting since 1996, and has grown to a worshipping congregation of about 200 people. Its mission in ministry focuses on serving and strengthening families in many different ways. Community Congregational has an active outreach to the community, and a deep interest in the renewal of public education for African-American families. Their pastor, **Rev. Bennie Liggins**, retired from the Air Force Chaplaincy in May. Bennie is devoting full time to strategies for mission, ministry, and church growth. He is also working approximately one day a week on the Conference staff as Associate Conference Minister for New Church Development.

South DeKalb New Church Start. This effort, funded by a partnership of the Board for Homeland Ministries, the Southeast Conference, and Trinity UCC in Chicago (the largest congregation in the UCC), is being pastored by the **Rev. Dr. Lewis Tait**. The South DeKalb New Church Start looks forward to having its first worship service in the first quarter of 2000. Currently, Lewis is doing research, becoming acquainted with area congregations and community leaders, and seeking a location for the first worship service. Lewis Tait developed Harambee UCC in Harrisburg, Pa, which now has 500 members after five years. Lewis has a reputation of being one of the most effective new church start developers in the United Church of Christ.

GSN Ministries (God, Self, and Neighbor). In mid-town Atlanta, this congregation had its first worship service on Easter Sunday, 1999, and is located at the Virginia Highlands Baptist Church. Currently it has 35 people in worship. It is led by **Rev. Kathi Martin**. This congregation is inclusive of all of God's children and is beginning to develop its community ministry. GSN Ministries has received an exploratory leadership subsidy grant from the Board for Homeland Ministries with a matching grant from the Southeast Conference, for the granting period, which is 12 months. Their goal is to have at least 40 worshipping members within that period of time; if they achieve that goal, they will be eligible for a continuing three-year subsidy. Kathi comes to the United Church of Christ having served in the AME church for several years. She is currently enrolled in a Doctorate of Ministry program at Columbia Theological Seminary, and received her Master of Divinity from ITC.

The LaGrange New Church Start. Currently the Conference is working with the members of Hillside Christian Church to arrange adequate pulpit supply for their needs at this time, while we embark on a search for a pastor for a new church start in LaGrange, Ga. Hillside Christian Church approached the Conference to say they wished to close their doors. The Conference sought funding to assist them in becoming a new church start, and we hope to have a pastor in place within six months.

Each of our new church starts is committed to setting an example to all of the congregations of the Southeast Conference by tithing 10 percent from their general budget to the support of OCWM (Our Church's Wider Mission). Please make every effort to acquaint yourself with this exciting new turn of events in the life of the Southeast Conference, by introducing yourself to the pastors and members of these efforts. May God bless our common vision, our ministries and missions, and our hopes for renewal!

Rekindle the Gift

With a measure of deep gratitude for her gifts and spirit, Rekindle the Gift bids farewell to Rev. **Elizabeth Clement**. Elizabeth named the project and offered great vision and eloquence in the early months as we shaped its future. We wish her well as she moves on to take a position working with Atlanta's seminaries.

Joyce Hollyday will continue with the development and research phases of Rekindle, as we search for a new co-director. In August, she and Elizabeth visited the **Franklinton Center in North Carolina**, a rich resource for churches in the Afro-Christian tradition and for all of the UCC. In October, she will visit the **Amistad Research Center in New Orleans**. Meanwhile, we continue to pursue funding for this important project, focused on oral history and renewal within our African-American congregations founded by the American Missionary Association.

A crowd gathered for groundbreaking at the Allen Retreat Center. A major fundraising effort is in place to raise \$40,000 more to complete the pavilion, and refurbish and furnish the office building.



NEWS

Resource Room Now Open

Thanks to the hard work of **Rev. Ginnie Ferrell**, the Southeast Conference Resource Room has opened its door at First Congregational UCC in Atlanta. The Resource Room is stocked with a vast array of books, papers, and videos. Preaching and prayer, calling a pastor, raising a child, AIDS awareness, baptism and confirmation, Old Testament poetry and plays, and community gardens are just a sampling of the rich diversity of topics covered. If you're interested in Bible study, Christian education, or spiritual development, there's something for you at the new resource center. Contact Ginnie Ferrell at the Conference Office (404-607-1993; 1-800-807-1993; extension 204).



Jimmy Loyless, Tim Downs, and Ginnie Ferrell at the new resource center.

Making our Churches Safe Places: Protecting All from Sexual Harm

A copy of the publication "Making the Church a Safe Place" is available to all congregations upon request. This booklet includes procedures and policies to protect congregations from sexual harm, and samples of statements to be signed by those who work for congregations as staff and volunteers. This publication is a guide to help congregations and their members become more aware of what sexual misconduct is, and when such occasions may take place. Typically sexual misconduct is surrounded by secrecy; it is often characterized by an abuse of power. In instances of sexual misconduct directed toward children and others who are vulnerable, there can be threats made that prevent the abused person from speaking out of fear.

The **Crisis Response Team** of the Southeast Conference was developed two years ago, so that we could respond to allegations of sexual misconduct and other crises in the life of congregations quickly and appropriately. The Crisis Response Team, in collaboration with the Conference staff, will respond pastorally to all potential situations of sexual misconduct and abuse. We encourage pastors to be particularly self aware in times of emotional vulnerability—in divorce, loss of loved ones, and sickness—and to seek care and support in those moments. If you have questions or concerns about this subject, or wish to order the booklet "Making the Church a Safe Place," **feel free to call the Conference Minister for further information.**

TAP Program Has Been Launched!

There's exciting news to share about TAP (Theology Among the People). Five groups are going strong, and more are under exploration. TAP, directed by **Dick Sales**, is making informal, quality theological education available to people throughout the Southeast Conference. The program is divided into seven courses that provide biblical and academic study, as well as exposure to the skills of ministry, such as preaching and counseling.

In **Montgomery, Ala.**, a group meeting Friday evenings at Community Congregational Church has completed the 8-week introductory course. A group of six in **Birmingham, Ala.**, began recently and is meeting on Saturday mornings. TAP groups have also begun in **Charleston, S.C.**, and **Huntsville, Ala.** **Rev. Richard Woodward** is leading a group in **Midway, Ga.**, as it begins study of the Gospel of Mark. Dick Sales will be in **Pleasant Hill, Tenn.**, to explore a course there and get input on the future of TAP from our many gifted, retired pastors and lay people there.

For more information on TAP, or to explore starting a group in your area, **contact Dick Sales at 205-591-8908.**

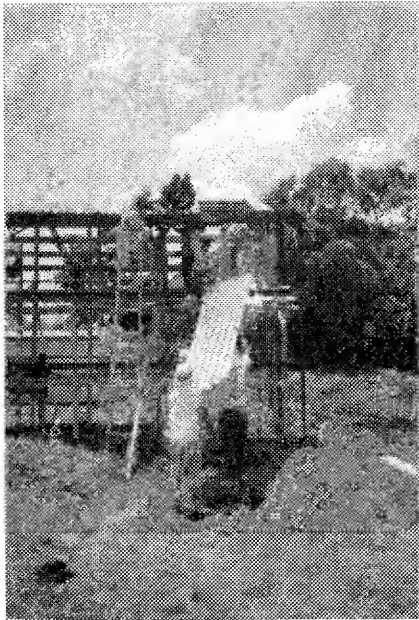


The Birmingham TAP group.

Pilgrimage United Church

The 1999 Journey

Work Tour to Ghana



Construction work in Ghana.

"That's the best \$2,500 I have ever spent," declared Dorothy DeVillars, a member of First Congregational UCC in Savannah, Ga., as she sat in Kotoka International Airport in Accra, Ghana, awaiting the first leg of her flight back to the United States. Her two weeks in Ghana as part of a work tour group were coming to a close. Dorothy and 14 other people from Ohio, Maine, and Georgia had journeyed August 1-14 to Ho, the capital city of the Volta Region in Ghana and the headquarters of our partner church, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana.

As its primary work project, the group installed a corrugated sheet-metal roof on a 40-foot by 60-foot steel-pole building. Working along with Ghanians, the folks also shoveled, hauled, and dumped sand, gravel, and cement to make concrete, then hauled the concrete in pan loads to pour most of the floor of the building. Additionally, the women spent three mornings in a bush village helping the villagers make and pour concrete for a church.

Although the work was hard, heavy, hot, tiring, and the central focus of the trip, the work tour was more than just labor. It was a time of meeting and working with, talking to, and worshipping with people of Ghana. Laughter, smiles, and stories were shared. With the morning hours devoted to work, afternoons offered trips to the Evangelical Presbyterian Seminary in Peki and the mountain village of Amedzofe. The Rt. Rev. J.Y. Ledo, moderator (president) of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, took the folks to his

home village, a small bush village of about 800 people. Children and adults alike turned out to greet the group. The children shouted with delight as a soccer ball and school supplies were presented to the village's school principal. Other afternoons found the group immersed in the outdoor public market in Ho and the in the artisans' craft market in Accra.

For Sunday worship, the group divided into four smaller groups, with each worshipping in a different village and congregation. Budd Friend-Jones, pastor of Central Congregational UCC in Atlanta, preached at Ho Kpodzi and assisted in the confirmation of more than 80 individuals. I had the privilege of preaching in the Ewe language in Klefe Kpodzi. Before becoming pastor at Pilgrimage UCC, I served as a missionary for four years in Ghana, and I was delighted to be able to organize this tour and return. Sunday afternoon, the paramount chief of Ho and his elders welcomed the travelers at the chief's palace. They shared in the pouring of libation and then the chief thanked the group for its work and witness among the people of Ho.

Participants from the Southeast Conference in addition to Dorothy DeVillars and Budd Friend-Jones were Gabe Friend-Jones, Mileta Neely, and Sharon Neely from Central Congregational, and Jerry Plante of Pilgrimage. Central Congregational, through its mission endowment fund, provided a \$4,000 grant to help cover the cost of the roofing materials. Another work tour to Ghana will be planned for 2001.

-Tim Morrison

The Caring Clowns

Several years ago, a 14-year-old soccer player suffered a brain injury during a game. He was taken to Scottish Rite Hospital near Atlanta, Ga. On his regular rounds, Kujo the clown stopped in to see him and the boy barely responded. A month later, Kujo was back and the boy smiled. A month after that, when he saw Kujo again, the boy said "Clown." His mother wept. It was the first word he had spoken since his injury.

Not every visit brings a miracle. But the Caring Clowns of Pilgrimage UCC in Marietta, Ga., are certainly involved in a ministry of uplift and healing. They juggle, make balloon animals, blow soap bubbles—whatever it takes to try to lift a few spirits. They visit on the wards of Atlanta-area hospitals, bringing smiles to adults and children alike. They take over a waiting room, to break the tension for people who are anxiously waiting to hear word on family members in surgery. A deaf mother tries a rope trick, and a Ukrainian child smiles at her dog made of balloons—true evidence that laughter is a universal language.

of Christ: Marietta, Georgia at Peace Church

Pilgrimage Youth Have a Blast with Uplands Seniors

It was a week without television, telephones, video games, and computers—and it was the time of our lives! Fourteen youth and three adults traveled from Pilgrimage UCC in Marietta, Ga., to do a work camp in Pleasant Hill, Tenn., at the Uplands Retirement Village, July 18-24. We slept on the floor, got up at 6:30 each morning, and after breakfast and worship in the Community House, reported in teams to work from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

We worked on trails in the woods, pulled a 50-foot tree out of a lake, dug flowerbeds, picked blueberries, weeded gardens, planted trees, worked with the children in the child-care center, visited folks in the nursing home, cooked meals, and led worship. We heard stories from Roger Robbennolt and learned from other programs provided by Uplands residents in the evenings. Most important, we made some incredible new friends.

When we spoke with the youth participants after our week at Uplands, the word “awesome” was used frequently to describe their experience. Many other words were used to describe our hosts: “warm,” “welcoming,” “thankful,” “energetic,” “fun,” “kind.”

“I believe that this trip has strengthened my faith in God,” said Justin Libby, 15. “This has also made me a better, friendlier person. We met so many thrilling people with so many amazing stories.”

Katie Semmelmayer, 14, had similar sentiments. “I realize that this experience has made me a more spiritual, emotional, stronger, better person. The best I can do is let it change me...and throw worries and preconceived notions out the window. People are never what you think they’d be.”

“I don’t think I’ll ever forget it,” said Glenn Orman, 15. “The mixture of the youth group, the residents, and fun made for one of the most meaningful experiences of my life.”

Thank you, Sharron Eckert and the Uplands community, for the best week our youth group could imagine. We miss you all, and we’ll be back.

-Amy Cantrell and Chrystal Cook



Pilgrimage youth at work in Pleasant Hill.



Sweetie Pie (Vicki Hagon), Dr. T (Tim Morrison), Kathy Burke (Volunteer), Wendikins (Wendy Libby-Bernstein), and Willy B. (Bill Bernstein).

In his other life, Kujo was Rev. Tim Morrison; today Tim’s clown identity is Dr. T. He’s accompanied at various times by Sweetie Pie, Raggy Maggy, Ta-da, Wendikins, Willy B., and other clowns from the church whose mission is to bring smiles in places of suffering. It’s a rare calling; as one young patient told Dr. T, “My minister would never do this.”

Tim recalls opening a door once and finding a young boy with scars on his face, a bandage on his head, and a trachea tube in his throat. He couldn’t speak, and blankets covered every part of him except his right foot. When Dr. T asked if he could come in, the boy barely nodded. Then Dr. T began blowing soap bubbles, getting them to land and pop on the boy’s exposed foot. Suddenly a big smile spread across the boy’s face and his eyes came alive. Truly there are many ways to serve Jesus Christ.

-Joyce Hollyday

FYI

Many exciting **overseas short-term volunteer opportunities** are available for individuals or groups through Global Ministries of the UCC. The placements range from two weeks to several months, in places as diverse as Japan, Eastern Europe, Nepal, Kenya, Paraguay, and Palestine. If you are handy with construction or making repairs, if you enjoy gardening or cleaning, if you are great at English or want to use your professional skills, there may be a position available for you. For more information, call Afia Griffith at 317-635-3100, extension 293, or visit the website at www.globalministries.org.

Last year the United Nations General Assembly responded to a united appeal from every living Nobel Peace Laureate, by proclaiming the year 2000 to be **"The Year for the Culture of Peace,"** and the years 2001-2010 to be the "International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence for the Children of the World." For information about resources and activities, contact the Fellowship of Reconciliation (914-358-4601).

The 10th Anniversary Commemoration to close the **School of the Americas** at Fort Benning, Ga., will be held November 19-21. Ten years ago, six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper, and her daughter were assassinated in El Salvador. Nineteen of the 26 officers cited by a U.N. Truth Commission for this atrocity were trained at the U.S. Army School of the Americas (SOA). The School has trained more than 60,000 Latin American soldiers in psychological operations and other civilian-targeted warfare techniques. Protests at the SOA have been steadily growing, and organizers hope for at least 10,000 people in November. For more information, or to participate, contact SOA Watch (202-234-3440).

The Coordinating Center for Women announces a resource called **Nosotras/We, Women**. It is a bilingual resource focused on the ongoing conversations that all women have with God in their daily lives. It includes ten lessons exploring spiritual questions, spiritual exercises, a retreat, a service of house blessing, and a music audiotape. To order, call 800-325-7061.

The **Fourth National Meeting of UCC Women**, "From Many Streams a New River," will be held April 27-30, 2000, in Charlotte, N.C. For more information, call the Coordinating Center for Women (216-736-2150).

Can You Help?

United Community Church in Waverly, Tenn., is in need of **room dividers** to create some fellowship space. If you have some to donate, church members will gladly come and get them. **Contact Rev. Gary Reyes at 615-296-3200.**

Mini-camp 2000 will be held at Noah's Ark, Panama City Beach, beginning the evening of Friday, May 5, and ending with worship on Sunday, May 7. This exciting annual event is open to all youth of the Southeast Conference. **Teachers, cooks, adult chaperones, and people to serve on the planning committee are needed.** For further information, contact the Conference Office.

Specialized Ministries Retreat

Across the Southeast Conference, many ordained ministers are working in classrooms, hospitals, prisons, shelters, counseling centers, and other "non-parish" settings. These **"specialized" (non-parish) clergy** are invited to come together as the guests of the newly organized Paul Rice Center for Spiritual Practice of Central Congregational UCC in Atlanta, Ga., **November 12-13** to meet one another and identify common concerns. **"Anointed and Sent"** will be the theme of a retreat jointly sponsored by Central UCC and the Southeast Conference Commission on Church and Ministry. Joyce Hollyday, Associate Conference Minister, and Budd Friend-Jones, Central's Senior Minister, will be facilitators for the event, which will start with dinner at 6:30 PM on Friday and conclude at 4:00 PM on Saturday. Meals and accommodation will be provided free of charge. There also will be no registration fee; but advanced registration is required. If you are ordained (or in care) within the Southeast Conference, and you are engaged in a specialized ministry, please call the **Central Church office (404-633-4505)** to indicate your interest. If you need child-care, or have special dietary or other needs, please let us know.

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Members of Oak Grove Christian Church in Pine Mountain, Georgia, unveil a monument in celebration of their 100th anniversary.

Rev. Laura Lee Landrum was ordained into Christian ministry at Central Congregational UCC, Atlanta, on Sunday, October 3. Laura is currently serving as interim pastor at Pilgrim Congregational UCC, Birmingham. **David Speno**, who is best known to us as the recently retired treasurer of the Conference, will be ordained on Sunday, November 14, at Central Congregational UCC, Atlanta. He will be called into a ministry of pastoral counseling.

Rev. Richard Woodward, who has previously served both Midway Congregational UCC and First Congregational UCC, Savannah, was called in August as pastor of First. **Rev. Ginnie Ferrell** and **Leslie Brogan** have been called to part-time positions at Central Congregational UCC, Atlanta. Ginnie will serve as Minister for Children and Youth, and Leslie as Minister for Community and Belonging.

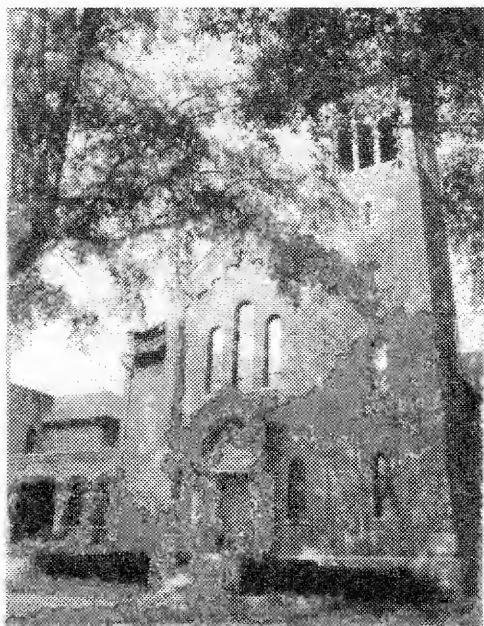
Rev. Dwight Andrews will be installed as Senior Pastor at First Congregational UCC in Atlanta on November 21.

Congratulations to **Rev. Eugene and Margaret Keen**, who were honored on September 26 at the United Church of Huntsville, for 50 years of service in the ministry.

Rev. Elizabeth Clement has been hired on the staff of "Faith and the City," a project to relate Atlanta seminaries and the city more closely, and to equip seminarians for more effective leadership in community settings.

Congratulations to the members of **First Congregational Christian Church** in Montgomery, Alabama, who have almost completed rebuilding their church. A fire struck the church in 1995.

St. John's United Church UCC, Cullman, Alabama, marked its 125th anniversary this year, culminating in a worship celebration on Memorial Day weekend.



CONFERENCE CALENDAR

NOVEMBER

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| 12 - 13 | Specialized Clergy Retreat
(Central Congregational Church, Atlanta, GA) |
| 14 | Ordination of David Speno
(Central Congregational Church, Atlanta, GA) |
| 19 - 20 | Grant Committee Meeting
(Central Congregational Church, Atlanta, GA) |
| 20 | EAL/WGA Men's Fellowship Dinner
(Congregational Christian Church, Lanett, AL) |
| 21 | Installation of Dwight Andrews
(First Congregational Church, Atlanta, GA) |
| 25 - 26 | Happy Thanksgiving (Conference office closed) |

DECEMBER

- | | |
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| 24 - 25 | Merry Christmas (Conference office closed) |
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Mission and Volunteer Opportunities Abound at Villa International Atlanta

By Erica Jenkins

"In today's climate of worldwide intolerance and ethnic strife, it is nice to know that there is a place where Muslims and Jews, Catholics and Protestants, international guests and metro Atlantans from all walks of life are living, working, and playing together in peace—every day. This place is Villa International Atlanta," shares Shirley Henderson Coleman. Shirley, a member of First Congregational UCC in Atlanta, serves on Villa's Board of Directors and on the Communications Committee. She has also been a volunteer for nearly a decade.

Other UCC Villa Board members include Delores Trice Washington, Valerie Lockett, and Steven Parker. Recently Dr. Timothy Downs and some of these Board members met with Villa staff to discuss current and future plans. We are most grateful for all of these persons, for the yearly contribution sent from the Southeast Conference Office, and for our partnership with the United Church of Christ.

Villa International Atlanta, located at 1749 Clifton Road, is a nonprofit international ministry of hospitality. Since its founding in 1967, Villa has hosted more than 17,000 medical professionals from 150 nations who come to study and do research at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Emory University School of Public Health, and Global Health Action, primarily. In addition to the Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ, which became a sponsor in 1969, six other denominations are Villa partners.

Villa began in response to the tragic death of an international researcher who committed suicide out of loneliness and homesickness. As a unique ecumenical body, we seek to offer support through friendship, evangelism, hospitality, medical compassion, and peacemaking to Villa guests. In the past three decades, many Villa residents from different faith persuasions have met, befriended, and, most importantly, received Christian witness from UCC members.

There is room for you at Villa! Volunteer opportunities for persons within the Atlanta area include office and repair help, transporting guests to worship or grocery stores, serving on the Board or committees. For those outside of Atlanta, hosting a shower for Villa needs or baking cookies are examples of volunteer possibilities. For more information or to volunteer, please call **Rev. Erica Jenkins at 404-633-6783.**

The fall **clergy retreat** was rescheduled for next spring. It will take place from noon on Tuesday, May 9, until 5 p.m. on Wednesday, May 10. The theme will be "Do We Have a Church There? The Future of the Local Church in the United Church of Christ." The retreat will be held at Pilgrim Congregational Church, Chattanooga, Tenn.

The **Graham Cluster Stewardship Meeting** will be held May 1-3 at Epworth by the Sea on St. Simon's Island, Ga.

Are You Prepared?

- ❶ Does your church participate in the UCCIB Property & Liability Insurance Program with automatic **full replacement value** (and flood and earthquake options)?
- ❷ Have your church buildings and contents been recently appraised and inventoried for full coverage?
- ❸ Do you conduct periodic inspections of church property for damage, *especially after severe weather events*?

The Southeast Conference is pleased to welcome our new Conference Agent, **Mark Slater, Sr.**, of the Sunbelt Insurance Group. Mark has over 35 years experience in insurance and served as President of the Professional Insurance Agents Association of Chattanooga. He is a member of Pilgrim Congregational Church and a former Trustee.

☞ **For more information and free materials, please call Mark toll-free at 1-800-589-9876.**

Southeast Feast

Food for the Heart and Soul

By Joyce Hollyday



My grandfather died 25 years ago this month. He was a collector of old coins, rare Native American relics, and envelopes with unusual postmarks. On a plot of wooded land near his home in Gettysburg, Pa., he showed me how to identify wildflowers in spring and animal tracks in winter. He taught me that love of the Creator begins with awe for the Creation.

I remember that as I was on a bus headed home for his funeral, I felt overcome by loss and almost suffocated by grief. The bus made a stop just outside Boston. A rotund woman with a shock of white hair, dressed in a ragged coat and a bright red-and-white-striped stocking cap, got on. With 27 empty seats to choose from, she flopped into the one next to me. "Praise the Lord, what a beautiful day!" she exclaimed, smiling my way. I didn't share her enthusiasm, and I wondered if it would be impolite to change my seat.

But soon she was asking me questions, probing gently with her warm and sparkling eyes. Before long, I was telling her about my grandfather. "How good of God to have given you such a gift!" she proclaimed. In that moment, I found my grief turning to gratitude; and I began to believe in angels.

I think of my grandfather at Thanksgiving. In his living and his dying, he taught me about being grateful to God.

A decade after his death, I was in Nicaragua. I arrived shortly after a massacre had taken place in a small village near the Honduran border. I will never forget one of the women I met there. Her husband and all of her sons had been killed in the attack. Only she and her daughter survived. "Thank you, God," was her prayer in church. "Thank you for sparing my daughter."

I found her prayer both inspiring and shocking. My own small faith has been nurtured by such people, who dwell not on tragedies, losses, or injustices, but on the goodness of God. During this season of thanksgiving, I call them to mind, to remind myself to be grateful for the many blessings in my life.

This Thanksgiving, whatever our circumstances, may we be mindful of God's abundant goodness. And as we move through the Advent season, may we be especially grateful for the greatest gift of all—the gift of a Son and a Savior.

May your Thanksgiving be bountiful, and your Christmas filled with joy.

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A Busy Fall for Covenant for Renewal

The Covenant for Renewal Team is experiencing a very busy and exciting fall as it responds to the needs of our congregations in the Southeast Conference. The team, which consists of leaders drawn from throughout the Conference, is committed to the idea that together we are able to meet the needs of our churches as they seek to be all that God calls them to be. The team is working on seven projects this fall:

September 24-25: **Vant Hardaway** and **Ed Schneider** were in **Knoxville, Tenn.**, at **Church of the Savior UCC**, aiding the congregation in putting together a mission statement.

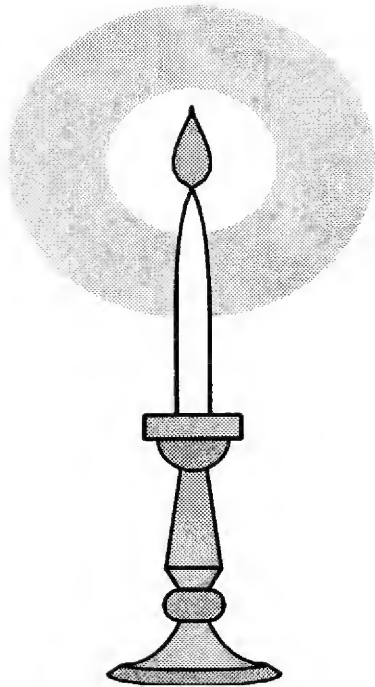
September 25: **Roy Bain** and **Elizabeth Clement** were in **Woodbury, Ga.**, at **Jones Chapel**, supporting the congregation in a first step to discover where it is that the Holy Spirit is leading them in the next century.

October 15-16: **Bennie Liggins** and **John Mingus**, with the support of Tim Downs, led a retreat "Tie Us Up, Lord" at **First United Church of Christ, Belvidere, Tenn.** During this event the congregation will be working on a mission statement.

October 25: **Tim Morrison** and **Tim Downs** will be working with our newest congregation, **First Immanuel** in **Decatur, Ga.**

We have also committed to and are finalizing details of events with **Oak Grove Congregational Christian Church** in **Pine Mountain, Ga.**, **Rush Memorial Congregational UCC** in **Atlanta**, and **Pilgrim Congregational UCC** in **Birmingham, Ala.**

Our team is busy, but we are ready to work with you and your congregation. For more information, contact **Conference Minister Tim Downs** at the **Conference Office (800-807-1993)**.



*"The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light...
For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counselor,
Mighty God,
Everlasting Father,
Prince of Peace. "
—Isaiah 9:2, 6*

*Christmas greetings of peace from the staff
of the Southeast Conference*

*Southeast Conference of the
United Church of Christ
756 W. Peachtree Street, NW
Atlanta, GA 30308-1138*

